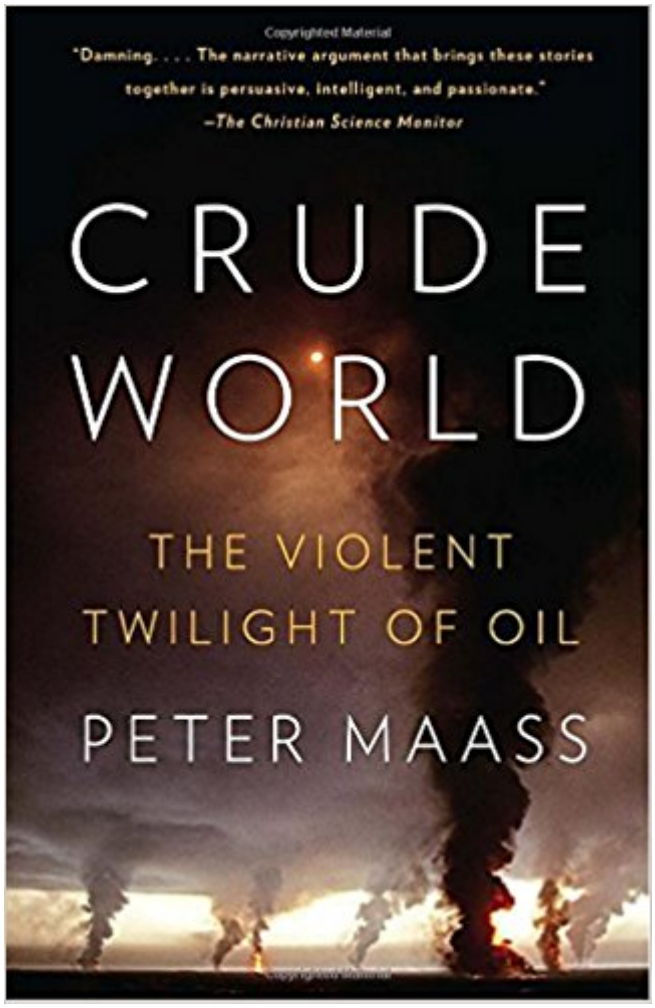
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Crude World: The Violent Twilight Of Oil



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Synopsis

The catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has brought new attention to the huge costs of our oil dependence. In this stunning and revealing book, Peter Maass examines the social, political, and environmental impact of petroleum on the countries that produce it.Every unhappy oil-producing nation is unhappy in its own way, but all are touched by the Ã¢â ¬Å“resource curseÃ¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •the power of oil to exacerbate existing problems and create new ones. Peter Maass presents a vivid portrait of the troubled world oil has created. From Saudi Arabia to Equatorial Guinea, from Venezuela to Iraq, the stories of rebels, royalty, middlemen, environmentalists, indigenous activists, and CEOsÃ¢â ¬â •all deftly and sensitively presentedÃ¢â ¬â •come together in this startling and essential account of the consequences of our addiction to oil.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Vintage; 1 Reprint edition (August 10, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1400075459

ISBN-13: 978-1400075454

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 29 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #164,079 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Energy Policy #37 inÃ Â Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Energy Production & Extraction > Fossil Fuels #64 inÃ Â Books > Business & Money > Industries > Energy & Mining > Oil & Energy

Customer Reviews

A Q&A with Peter Maass Question: You write about BP's problematic safety record in Crude World. Were you surprised by the Deepwater Horizon disaster? Peter Maass: Unfortunately not. Within the past decade, BP has been responsible for disasters in other locations, such as an explosion at a Texas refinery that took 15 lives, as well as major spills from its pipelines in Alaska. Taking risks and cutting corners appear to be the norm. But BP succeeded in the domain that counts the most in any industry--it was highly profitable. Tony Hayward, the firm's chief executive, and John Browne, his predecessor, were highly regarded by their peers and their

shareholders.Question: What do you think of BP’s response so far?Peter Maass: It has been miserable, and predictably so. Due to its cost-cutting and its hubris, BP did not have an adequate response plan. Whether from mendacity or ineptitude, it underestimated the spill in the early days and refused to make public the video feeds it had of the underwater gusher (the government eventually forced it to share the video). But it’s important to understand that BP is not a tremendous exception; blowouts and spills and secrecy are consistent features of oil extraction. Although a handful of companies are better-run than BP, a larger number are far worse.Question: In Crude World you discuss major spills in Ecuador and Nigeria. How do you think the Deepwater Horizon spill will compare?Peter Maass: It’s unlikely the amount leaking into the Gulf of Mexico will come close to what’s happened in Nigeria. For Nigeria, a drip-drip scenario over the course of decades has all but destroyed the Niger Delta wetlands. In Ecuador, spilled oil isn’t the only problem because billions of gallons of toxic wastewater have been poured into rivers. We need to understand that oil extraction poses a range of hazards--including the burning of natural gas--and spills are just one.Question: What initially got you interested in the story of oil? Peter Maass: Much of my writing life involved wars, and oil was often mentioned. "It’s all about oil," I was told. Or, "It’s not about oil at all." Oil is central to our world, but what role does it play in violent conflicts and the divide between rich and poor? Some excellent books had been published, of course, but mainly for academic or expert readers. I had found my subject--a book that would explain in compelling ways what we do for oil and what oil does to us. Question: What surprised you most as you were reporting the story? Peter Maass: Oil, as the topic of a book, defied the norms of interrogation. It doesn’t have a voice, body, army or dogma of its own. How do you coax secrets from a liquid? I had to travel around the world and talk to all sorts of people--oilmen, warlords, politicians, economists, geologists, environmentalists, sheikhs, lobbyists, and roughnecks. The subjects we discussed ranged from history to law, corruption, engineering, culture, psychology, and justice. I was journeying through an intellectual as much as a physical world. Question: What do you see as the most necessary change that needs to be made to begin to curtail the problems associated with oil? Peter Maass: We need to curtail our appetite for oil. We need to understand--and I hope my book provides some help on this--that our dependence on oil harms the countries that produce it. Violence, poverty, corruption, pollutionÃ¢â ¬â •these are linked to oil. The Deepwater Horizon disaster reminds us of what has been happening. We need to become more conservation-minded and efficient, and we need to develop renewable energy on a broad scale. For all of us, consumers and suppliers, it will be a long and painful process. But it can be done. (Photo Ã Â© Erinn Hartman) --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Maass (Love Thy Neighbor) brings fresh detail to a familiar topic in this worrying but never sensationalistic look at the murky world of oil. Supplies of the resource may already have entered a period of rapid decline, with Saudi Arabia, long the world's largest oil producer, possibly passing the peak point of production just as demand from China surges. Maass exposes the staggering destruction oil has wrought in countries less well-known as energy suppliers. The author recounts how the greed of Western oil companies, governments and consumers have propped up such vicious and corrupt dictatorships as that in Equatorial Guinea, where flights run nonstop from the destitute capital to Texas. The author's Toxic Tour of Ecuador uncovers more cause for concern, like the fact that more oil has been spilled into that country's rain forests and stretch of than were spilled by the Exxon Valdez in Alaska. Reported from countries ranging from Russia to Nigeria, Maass's heartfelt and beautifully crafted book reveals how one of oil's darkly magical properties is that it erases inconvenient memories. (Sept. 23) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Maass does a great job explaining the Curse of Oil, the Paradox of Plenty, the Dutch Disease, or whatever name you want to call the effect of extractive industries on countries without much economic diversification and even less political transparency. He says little or nothing about Peak Oil, and how recent advances in drilling technology such as fracking, may have moved the doomsday clock of scarcity back a generation. Maass takes us on a journey from country to country where the oil companies have raped the land while getting rich extracting and selling the black gold found underneath the land. The effects of unsupervised oil production are not pretty. Polluted waterways, birth defects and corruption are just a few of the side effects which happen when oil companies cut costs and corners in production, because they can, because their competitors do, and because the individual governments allow them to. Maass describes all of this in an interesting readable style, but he is more of an observer than a problem solver. He does not propose solutions to the curse. Is that solution an end to drilling? Is it better regulation? Is the solution industrial development to provide an economic counterweight to the money the drillers bring to a country? Maass does not really tell us. He describes the problem, but not the solution. Maass's introductory quote John Paul Getty, however, may give us a hint as to what Maass thinks should be done. According to Getty: "The meek shall inherit the Earth, but not the mineral rights." Maybe Maass is telling us that we bear some responsibility for permitting First World companies to treat Third World

nations like the Wild West where First World Rules don’t apply and all that matters is power and greed. Maass may also be hinting that a little less meekness from the people who live where oil is found may help turn the Curse into a prayer.

Oil seems to be bad news. The BP Deep Horizon disaster is a timely illustration of the point: the company, with cavalier disregard of safety issues lobbied strenuously against a variety of blowout containment measures. BP has a long record of disregard for facilities maintenance. BP has had several fatal disasters. BP has a dismal environmental record. BP is unlikely to clean up the mess in the Gulf of Mexico and has consistently and deliberately underestimated the extent of the damage. BP probably will not compensate the fisheries industry, tourism, homeowners and others for their losses assuming irreparable damage to the ecosystem and the Gulf economy has not already occurred. BP is emblematic of the problems inherent in the extraction and marketing of petroleum products and journalist Peter Maas very compellingly and cogently addresses the entire sorry mess in this book."Crude World" is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the petroleum industry and its captains: "The Prize" by Peter Yergin best fills that role. Instead, it is a trenchantly argued polemic and indictment: witness the chapter titles ("Scarcity", "Plunder", "Rot", "Contamination", "Fear", "Greed", "Desire", "Alienation", "Empire", "Mirage"). Maas uses copious examples which illustrate the book’s premise. The author adroitly places editorial commentary to illustrate the facts which are seemingly self-evident.Maas argues that petroleum corrupts and defiles the countries from which it is extracted. For example, he asserts that the government of Equatorial Guinea, with its inherent corruption and maniacal violence has been materially worsened by the presence of copious amounts of petroleum and the oceans of cash that it has garnered. He further claims that the brutality, inefficiency, avarice, disregard for the welfare of the population and the environment are all further exacerbated by petroleum-related wealth regardless of the country of origin, with the apparent exceptions of the UK and Norway. While Maas is doubtlessly correct in that assertion (witness the corruption and coziness between governments in the "developed countries" like the U.S. and major oil companies), he tacitly notes that its human nature to serve one’s self-interest first: his explanation for the Norwegian phenomenon is that Norway is an advanced democracy. It seems to me that, were the principals of good government and rule of law already part of the social compact, petroleum would advance rather than retard development in other countries, as well. Prior to the discovery of oil, Norway already had a diversified economy and an intelligent, well-educated and cohesive electorate. Other countries., in contradistinction, repeatedly fall prey to oil company machinations. Perhaps it is because most lack a diversified economy, many have ideologically

motivated governments and fearful, atomized populations. So, oil lubricates not only machinery, but corruption and other bad traits, as well. Not terribly surprising.There are other looming problems for a fossil-fuel dependent world. In general, oil is located in ever more remote and inaccessible regions. Of equal importance, it seems to be concentrated in politically unstable areas. Alternative fossil-fuel sources (coal, oil shale, tar sands) are environmentally devastating, both in their extraction and in their combustion byproducts. Climate change is upon us and, at this stage can hardly be reversed. So, what does Maas advocate? Promotion of "social values", "Publish What You Pay" (transparency in government and corporations), enforcement of current laws are some proposed solutions. Education and incentives for developing alternatives are others.Maas draws appropriate attention to the fact that petroleum extraction, while it provides money does not provide many jobs nor does it serve as an adequate basis for a self-sustaining economy. Witness, for example, the economic dead zone that exists in Iran and Saudi Arabia: minus petroleum revenue, there isn't much there. Maas also notes (but does not concentrate on) the environmental depredation caused by oil drilling, citing, for example, the debacle caused by Chevron in South America. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, when Chevron departed, the Equadoran national petroleum company simply perpetuated and ignored the matter.In "Crude World", Maas makes a compelling and readable argument against the petroleum industry and its "Black Plaque". I see the matter somewhat differently: rather than creating a dichotomy ("us vs. them"), the problems associated with oil are more like Walt Kelly in "Pogo" characterized it: "We have met the enemy and he is us". Its time to do something. Maybe reading this book will help convince the "unconverted".

Curiously this book starts out discussing the issue of how much oil is left, specifically in Saudi Arabia but then switches gears to document a whole series of cases studies in which oil has been a negative influence rather than a positive one on many of the countries where it has been found. Examples include Equatorial Guinea, Ecuador, Venezuela, Russia, Some of the Former Soviet Republics, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others. Books like this that required field research by authors often produce very interesting anecdotes and stories about places many people never hear about, and in that sense, this book definitely doesn't disappoint. Sadly, many of the stories about graft, despotism, theft of national resources, bribes and accidents in the oil industry will probably not be much of a revelation to most readers. It is at the same time a triumph of the book and a shortcoming that the author has managed to present such an emotional view on the evils of oil. It certainly helps personalize it for many people who probably fill up their car without any thought or knowledge of where the oil comes from. On the other hand, his characterization tends to present a gloomy, almost

dystopian view of many of these countries. I think the book is most definitely a useful primer on the seedier sides of oil production, but I would hope that readers of it would not take the vignettes presented here as a general characterization of the countries in question. In some cases, such as Equatorial Guinea, oil may actually be more or less the only show in town. In others, such as Venezuela or Russia, oil is only a part of multifaceted and complex cultures and economies. Overall, I really liked this book and found it to be a real page turner as well as one of those books that points out a lot of clever ways of viewing things. Oil production is a topic that is starting to get a bit saturated in the book industry, but this one still manages to be fairly fresh.

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